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DOGMATIC SERIES

BY

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Priest of Columbus Diocese

Sacramentals
Blessed Virgin
Last Things

VOLUME V

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DOGMATIC SERIES.

Vol. V.

CHAPTER I.

SACRAMENTALS.

SACRAMENTALS are things set aside or blessed by the Church. They are intended to enliven piety and devotion in the hearts of the faithful.

Many ceremonies and practices adopted by the Church are also sacramentals. Exorcisms and blessings are sacramentals. The ceremonies connected with the administration of the Sacraments are sacramentals. It is from this perhaps that they derive their name.

The sacramentals were instituted by the Church. The Sacraments were instituted by Christ. The sacramen-

tals never give grace directly. They may, however, incite devotion so that more grace is gained.

The sacramentals do not remit sin. However, they may remit venial sin through the fervor which they engender. In the same manner they may also remit the temporal punishment due to sin.

The sacramentals have a greater effect than private devotions. They are, as it were, official means of devotion. They have merit in themselves, for they are instituted by the authority of the Church.

The whole ritual of the Church is practically composed of sacramentals. Such are the ceremonies of the Mass, the blessings, prayers and things used in the administration of the Sacraments.

The sign of the cross, genuflections and other pious actions are sacramentals. The sign of the cross is the

chief sacramental used by the faithful. It is a silent prayer to God for help and protection. It is also a profession of faith in the unity and trinity of God.

The Church blesses many things. Both the blessing and the thing blessed are sacramentals. Blessings whether given to persons or placed upon things are sacramentals. The words of the blessing usually express the favor that is asked of God.

Consecrations given by bishops are sacramentals. Holy oils and holy chrism are sacramentals. The holy oils are consecrated by the bishop on Holy Thursday.

Exorcisms are sacramentals. They are prayers and invocations adopted by the Church to expel the demons from persons, places or things. Exorcisms are included in the ceremonies of Baptism. They are also used in certain blessings.

Holy water is a sacramental much

used in the Church. It is ordinary water blessed by the priest. Salt is placed in the water when it is being blessed. Exorcisms are pronounced over both the salt and the water.

The priest says: "I exorcise thee, creature of salt, through the living God, through the true God, through the holy God, through God Who, by the prophet Eliseus, ordered thee to be cast into the water, thus to cure the sterility of the water. Mayest thou become salt exorcised for the good of believers. Mayest thou be health of soul and body to all that partake of thee. May all thought, malice and wiles of diabolical deceit flee and depart from the place in which thou hast been sprinkled, likewise every unclean spirit abjured by Him who will come to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire. Amen."

Then the priest says: "Let us pray. O omnipotent and eternal God, we

humbly implore Thy infinite mercy that Thou deign to bless and sanctify by Thy love this creature of salt, which Thou hast given for the use of man. Let it be for all that partake of it strength of mind and body. Let whatever has been touched by it or sprinkled with it be free from all uncleanness, and from every onslaught of spiritual malice. Through our Lord."

The exorcism of water follows: "I exorcise thee, creature of water, in the name of the Father almighty, in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son our Lord, and in the power of the Holy Ghost. Mayest thou become water exorcised to repel the power of the enemy. Mayest thou be able to drive out and repulse the enemy himself together with his apostate angels: through the power of the same Jesus Christ our Lord who will come to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire. Amen."

Again the priest says: "Let us pray. God, Who for the salvation of the human race didst found one of the greatest Sacraments in the substance of water, hearken to our prayers and pour Thy blessing upon this element fitted for so many purifications. May this creature which serves Thee so mysteriously receive the power of Thy divine grace to expel demons and to alleviate maladies. May the homes and dwellings of the faithful that are sprinkled with this water be freed from all uncleanness and from all evil. May the afflicting spirit and blasting winds not visit them. May all snares of the lurking enemy depart therefrom. Let whatever may threaten the peace and well-being of those who dwell there be dispersed at the sprinkling of this water. Thus through the invocation of Thy holy name we implore that they may be preserved from every ill. Through our Lord."

Here the priest thrice puts salt into the water, saying: "Let this salt and water both be mixed together in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

"The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit."

"Let us pray. God, the Author of unbroken power, the King of unconquerable empire, and ever the wondrous Victor, who crush the power of hostile domination, who overthrow the fierceness of the raging enemy, who mightily withstand the opposing fury—Thee, O Lord, trembling and suppliantly we beseech and beg that Thou look with favor on this creature of salt and water and benignantly ennoble it.

"Sanctify it by the dew of Thy love, so that wheresoever it be sprinkled, through the invocation of Thy holy name, every taint of the unclean spirit may be wiped out, and the terror of the venomous serpent be driven

afar off. May the presence of Thy holy Spirit everywhere abide with us who seek Thy mercy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns in the unity of the same Holy Ghost God forever. Amen."

Crosses, statues, pictures, palms, ashes, scapulars, medals, rosaries are blessed by the Church. They are sacramentals. The altar-cards, linens, candles, missal and other things used at the altar are also sacramentals.

The Church blesses oils, food, grain, fruits, drink, cattle, fields, wells, machines, railroads, telegraph, electric plants, houses, schools, bells, chapels, churches and cemeteries. These blessings are sacramentals.

The blessing of a house is beautiful. "God the Father Almighty, we fervently beseech Thee for this home, for those who dwell herein, and for all that it contains. Deign to bless and sanctify them and to fill them with all

good things. Grant unto them, O Lord, abundance from the dew of Heaven, sustenance of life from the fullness of the earth. Lead the desires of their heart to the goal of Thy mercy. At our entrance then deign to bless and sanctify this home as Thou didst bless the abode of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. May the angels of Thy light dwell within the walls of this house to guard it and those who dwell herein. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

The blessing of a school building expresses the hopes of Mother Church for the little ones. "Lord Jesus Christ, who didst command Thy Apostles to invoke peace upon every house into which they entered, sanctify, we beseech Thee, this building destined for the education of children. Pour out upon it the abundance of Thy blessing and peace. May salvation be unto them as it was to the house of Zacheus when Thou didst enter it. Command

Thy angels to guard it and to drive from it every influence of the enemy. Fill those who teach herein with the spirit of knowledge, of wisdom and of Thy fear. Foster the pupils in heavenly grace, so that whatever they learn profitably they may understand with their intellect, retain in their heart, and fulfil in their lives. And may those who frequent this building delight Thee by the practice of all virtues so that they may merit some time to be received into an eternal dwelling in Heaven.”

Christ gave His Church the power to bless. Indulgences are sometimes attached to blessings. This must always be by the authority of the Pope. A plenary indulgence is attached to the papal blessing. The Pope often grants bishops and priests the privilege of imparting the papal blessing. A plenary indulgence is also attached to the Apostolic blessing given to the

dying. This indulgence is gained only at the moment of death. The blessing, however, may have been given long before.

The Agnus Dei is a precious sacramental. It is a wax figure blessed by the Pope. It bears the image of a lamb impressed upon it. This symbolizes Christ as the Lamb of God. John the Baptist first gave Christ this title.

The Pope blesses the Agnus Dei on the Saturday preceding Whitsunday. Yet he does not perform this ceremony every year. He blesses the Agnus Dei in the first year of his pontificate. Then he blesses it every seventh year thereafter.

The sacramentals do not depend upon the priest for their effect. Their efficiency is from the Church. The Church is the Bride of Christ. She is also the loving mother of mankind. She loves to use her great powers

for the benefit of her children. She puts a blessing on everything that she touches. She asks God's help for her children in all that they do. She is indeed the mother of tender love to us.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

THE Blessed Virgin Mary was born of the saintly parents, Joachim and Anne. Tradition has it that at an early age she was consecrated to God and that she made a solemn vow of virginity.

The Jews of that time entered into marriage at a very early age. Two separate ceremonies were required for entering the married state. The first was the espousals. The espousals formed the legal marriage. After this at least a year elapsed before the ceremony of marriage proper was celebrated.

It was only after this second ceremony that they began their cohabitation. It was undoubtedly after her

marriage proper that the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived of the Holy Ghost.¹

“Whereupon Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away. But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. . . .

“Now all that was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us . . . and Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife. And he knew her not till she had brought forth her

¹ St. Matthew i, 18.

first-born son; and he called his name Jesus.”²

Mary was, both before and after the birth of Christ, a spotless virgin. Though the Gospel says that St. Joseph “knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son,” it does not mean that he “knew her” afterwards. There is abundant proof in the New Testament for the perpetual virginity of the blessed Mother of our Saviour. The least shadow of doubt to the contrary makes every true Christian heart shudder. It is sad to know that there have been men so base as to question this prerogative of Christ’s holy Mother.

“The Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. . . .

² St. Matthew i, 19-25.

“And the angel said to her: Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. . . . And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man? And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee, And therefore the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”³

Many indeed supposed that Jesus was the son of Joseph. However, this was but natural since they did not know the mystery of the Incarnation. It is related in the Gospel: “And Jesus . . . being (as it was supposed) the Son of Joseph.”⁴

The words of Christ dying on the cross, clearly show that the Blessed

³ St. Luke i, 26-35.

⁴ St. Luke iii, 23.

Virgin would be left alone after His death. Christ, moved with tenderness towards her, asks St. John to care for His Blessed Mother and be like a son to her: "When Jesus therefore had seen His Mother and the disciple standing whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her for his own."⁵

The early Fathers of the Church, with one accord, proclaim the perpetual virginity of Mary. "Can I not quote against you a whole array of ancient writers, Ignatius, Polycarp, Ireneus, Justin the martyr, and many other apostolic and eloquent men?"⁶ Thus cried out St. Jerome against Helvidius who sought to question the perpetual virginity of Mary.

⁵ St. John xix, 26-27.

⁶ *Contra Helvidium*, n. 17.

The Fathers applied the words of Ezechiel to Mary: "This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut."⁷

"Helvidius' error is indeed detestable," says St. Thomas, "he was so rash as to say that St. Joseph begot other children of Christ's mother after the birth of Christ. This is derogatory to the perfection of Christ. By His divine nature, He is the only Begotten of the Father as the perfect Son in all things. Thus it was but becoming that He should be the only child of His mother as the all-perfect fruit of her womb.

"In the second place, this error insults the Holy Ghost, whose sanctuary was the virgin womb in which He formed the body of Christ. Wherefore it would be unbecoming that it should be violated by mere human generation.

⁷ Ezechial xliv, 2.

“In the third place, it is not becoming the dignity and sanctity of God’s mother to think that she should desire other children after having given birth to such a Son. . . . Nor could such presumption be imputed to Joseph. . . . Wherefore we simply declare that the mother of God as a virgin, conceived and brought forth her Son and remains a virgin forever.”⁸

The Blessed Virgin Mary is really the Mother of God. Jesus Christ is both God and man. Both His divine and His human nature are united in one person. Hence, the mother of Jesus Christ is the mother of God. For Jesus Christ is true God.

Elizabeth calls the Blessed Virgin “the mother of my Lord.”⁹ St. Ambrose says: “What is more noble than the mother of God?”¹⁰

⁸ Summa Theologica 3 q. 28, a. 3.

⁹ St. Luke i, 43.

¹⁰ De Virginibus Lib. ii, c. 2. n. 7.

The title, "Mother of God," has been commonly given to the Blessed Virgin since the early centuries of the Church. In the "Hail Mary" the Church teaches us to say: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners."

Jesus Christ was indeed begotten of the Father as God from all eternity. Yet He is the same person that was born of the Blessed Virgin in Bethlehem. He was born in eternity as God and in time as man. God is His eternal Father as God, and as man Mary is His mother. Mary is the mother of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Because of her sublime dignity, Mary has been honored by the Church from the beginning. No higher dignity could be conceived amongst creatures than that held by the Blessed Virgin Mary. "God Himself could not have made a greater creature than she," says St. Bonaventure, "God could

make a greater world; He could make a greater heaven; but He could not make a greater mother than the Mother of God.”¹¹

The Blessed Virgin is venerated in the Church as the most powerful intercessor with God, amongst all the angels and saints of Heaven. In every church there is an altar on which is found a statue of the Blessed Virgin. Her picture adorns the walls of every sacred edifice. It is but natural that we should find statues and pictures of a loving mother in the house of such a loving Son. Yea, and her picture hangs on the walls of every true Christian home. It would be strange indeed were it not so; for she is our Mother.

How well those prophetic words of Christ's holy mother have been fulfilled: “Behold from henceforth all

¹¹ *Speculum beatae Mariae Virginis*. Op. Om. t. xiv, p. 260, Parisiis, 1868.

generations shall call me blessed.”¹² She is honored in the liturgy of the Church. Many feasts are celebrated in her honor. The month of May is especially set aside for devotions to the Blessed Virgin.

Three hundred millions of Christian hearts are lifted up each day in that beautiful prayer called the Angelical Salutation. And who can count the Rosaries and Litanies that are offered up throughout the world, day by day, to the Blessed Mother of our Divine Saviour. The appeal that we make to Christ through the veneration of His Blessed Mother is twofold. It touches His love for us and His love for Her.

Little is known of the Blessed Virgin's death. It is held in the Church that she was taken body and soul into Heaven. Yet this is not defined as of Faith. Since the body of Christ was formed from the body of the Blessed

¹² St. Luke i, 48.

Virgin, they are, in a certain sense, one flesh.

Christ saw fit to preserve His Own body from corruption. Hence, we can not suppose that He would permit His Blessed Mother's body to decay upon earth. Surely the flesh from which the Saviour of the world was formed would not be permitted to return to dust. Indeed it is but becoming that her all-pure body which never knew the slightest taint of sin should be taken into Heaven. No other creature ever received such graces as were bestowed upon Mary. She possessed privileges that were far greater than that of having her body preserved from corruption and taken into Heaven.

The Blessed Virgin Mary enjoys more glory in Heaven than all the other saints and angels. In our prayers she is styled the "Queen of Heaven, Queen of Angels, Queen of All Saints."

Mary is, of all creatures, the most holy, the most pure, the best beloved of God. In Mary is found the closest union that could exist between God and His creatures. She has been elevated by her Divine Maternity to the very borderland, as it were, of Divinity. She is indeed "Our Life, Our Sweetness, and Our Hope." Through her our blessed Redeemer came into the world. She is in truth "The Cause of our Joy."

CHAPTER III.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

THE Blessed Virgin Mary from the moment of her conception was preserved free from original sin. This was a special privilege bestowed upon her by God through the merits of Christ our Redeemer. Faith teaches us that every child of Adam comes into this world tainted with original sin. From the time of Adam, the Blessed Virgin Mary is the sole exception to this law. It is because she was chosen from all the children of man to be the medium through which the Redeemer should come to free us from that sin.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was not defined until the

year 1854. It was then proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in these words: "We declare, pronounce, and define the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary from the very moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from every taint of original sin—that this doctrine has been revealed by God and is therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."¹

The Angel Gabriel was, perhaps, the first to proclaim the Immaculate Conception. He said to the Blessed Virgin: "Hail full of grace."² She could not have been "full of grace" had she ever been tainted with sin. No other creature was ever addressed

¹ Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, n. 1502.

² St. Luke i, 28.

in such words by a messenger from Heaven.

St. Augustine says: "Therefore, except the Holy Virgin Mary concerning whom, because of the honor due to the Lord, I do not wish to bring up even the question of sin."³

It can not be supposed that Christ would have allowed His Blessed Mother to remain, even for one instant, in the power of Satan. It was but proper that she who was to bear the Saviour of the world should be brought forth in the original justice of man before the fall.

The Blessed Virgin Mary was also free from concupiscence. For since the Mother of God was free from original sin, she was also freed from all evil inclination. Concupiscence is the direct consequence of original sin.

³ De Natura et gratia c. 36, n. 42; m. 44.

Hence it could not have existed in the Immaculate Mother of God.

No true Christian from the beginning has ever associated the idea of sin with the Blessed Mother of our Redeemer. The very thought of sin in Mary is opposed to every noble sentiment of our hearts.

Mary is the great model of womanhood. The cult of Mary has done more to elevate woman than all the other agencies of the world. Motherhood and virginity have both been sanctified in Mary. She is the one creature of God that shows forth the infinitude of God's love for man. God filled her with all the perfection that created nature can receive.

The spotless purity of Mary is the proudest boast of the human race. The glory of her most pure life shall shed lustre on all peoples of all ages until the end of time. For all eternity the angels and saints will rejoice in the

beauty and splendor of her most pure body and soul. On earth the faithful for all time will ever receive new courage and new hope in their struggles against the world, the flesh and the devil by calling upon this "Queen conceived without the stain of original sin."

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH.

“IT IS appointed unto man once to die.”¹ The decree of death was passed upon man in the Garden of Eden after Adam fell into sin. God said to Adam: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.”²

Death is natural to man. God had raised man to a state of immortality when He created him. The human body is naturally liable to corruption. By the grace of God alone it was to be preserved from the ravages of death.

¹ Epistle to the Hebrews ix, 27.

² Genesis iii, 19.

By his sin man lost the gift of immortality God had given him. He fell from the supernatural to the natural state. Then death and suffering became his portion. "By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men."³

Death is the separation of the soul from the body. The soul enters into eternity. The body returns to dust. "Man shall go into the house of his eternity, and the mourners shall go round about in the street. Before the silver cord be broken, and the golden fillet shrink back, and the pitcher be crushed at the fountain, and the wheel be broken upon the cistern, and the dust return into its earth, from whence it was, and the spirit return to God, who gave it."⁴

Death is called dissolution: "The

³ Epistle to the Romans v, 12.

⁴ Ecclesiastes xii, 5, 7.

time of my dissolution is at hand.”⁵ The Apostle calls the body our earthly habitation. “For we also, who are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened: because we would not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that that which is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”⁶

The soul continues to live after it leaves the body. “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord (holy and true) dost thou not judge and revenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”⁷

The souls of the dead are not asleep or in a stupor. They actually live and act. They are called spirits.

⁵ II Epistle to Timothy iv, 6.

⁶ II Epistle to the Corinthians v, 4.

⁷ Apocalypse vi, 9, 10.

"In which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison."⁸ They "shall be as the angels of God in heaven. . . . He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."⁹

God by His omnipotence can easily supply the separated souls with whatever is necessary for their activity. The soul separated from the body will be in a higher state than that of this life. It will be free from the sufferings and imperfections of a mortal body. It will possess clearer knowledge. It will resemble the angels of Heaven.

The law of death is general. Yet the great prophets, Henoch and Elias, were translated. They did not die. Henoch "walked with God, and was seen no more: because God took him."¹⁰ "Elias went up by a whirlwind into heaven."¹¹ "By faith," says

⁸ I Epistle of St. Peter iii, 19.

⁹ St. Matthew xxii, 30, 32.

¹⁰ Genesis v, 24.

¹¹ IV Kings ii, 11.

St. Paul, "Enoch was translated, that he should not see death."¹² Enoch and Elias did not taste death. Yet this fact does not argue against the universal decree of death. "Enoch and Elias were translated," says St. Augustine, "wherever they are, they are alive. And if a certain conjecture of Holy Writ fail not, they are to die. For the Apocalypse (xi, 3-7) mentions two wonderful prophets who are to die and ascend to the Lord, yet it does not give their names."¹³

The words of St. Matthew do not contradict this explanation. "And his disciples asked him saying: Why do the Scribes say that Elias must come first? But he answering, said to them: Elias indeed shall come and restore all things, But I say unto you, that Elias is already come . . . then the disciples understood that he had spoken

¹² Epistle to the Hebrews xi, 5.

¹³ Sermon 29, n. 11.

to them of John the Baptist.”¹⁴ Christ wanted them to understand that John the Baptist was the precursor of His first coming as Elias shall be the precursor of His second coming.

St. Paul seems to say that on the Last Day the just will not die. “We who are alive,” says he, “who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them who have slept . . . the dead who are in Christ, shall rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ, into the air, and so shall we be always with the Lord.”¹⁵

Commenting on these words, St. Augustine says: “Indeed so far as the words of the Apostles are concerned, he seems to assert that at the end of the world, at the coming of the Lord when the dead shall rise, certain ones

¹⁴ St. Matthew xvii, 10-13.

¹⁵ I Epistle to the Thessalonians iv, 14-16.

that are alive are not to die. . . . Yet I fear the Apostle will say to those who think that some will pass into everlasting life without suffering death: 'Senseless man, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die first.' For that also which we read in the greater number of cordices, 'We shall all indeed rise again,'* how can it be unless we shall all die?"¹⁶

St. Ambrose explains the passage thus: "In the instant of being snatched away death shall overtake them as if it were a swooning. So that in a moment the departed soul is returned."¹⁷ This explanation is generally accepted. The Church has not decided the question. However, the Roman Catechism says: "The Church acquiesces in the opinion which holds that all without exception are to die.

* I Ep. to the Corinthians xv, 36-51.

¹⁶ Epistle 193, n. 9.

¹⁷ Comment in I Thess. iv.

She considers it more in conformity with the truth.”¹⁸

The Sacred Writers often refer to the loss of God’s grace as death.¹⁹ This is spiritual death in the proper sense of the word. St. Paul says: “We were dead in sins.”²⁰

The lot of the damned is sometimes called the second death. “And hell and death were cast into the pool of fire. This is the second death.”²¹

Death is the penalty of sin. Hence sin is often called death. “I will deliver them out of the hand of death. I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy death: O hell, I will be thy bite.”²²

After death we can no longer perform meritorious works. Our work for our own salvation is ended at the

¹⁸ On the Creed, art. II.

¹⁹ Ch. Pesch. Prael. Dogm., vol. IX, p. 277.

²⁰ Epistle to the Ephesians ii, 5.

²¹ Apocalypse xx, 14.

²² Osee xiii, 14.

moment of death. "I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."²³ The time of our probation ends with death. At that moment our fate is decided for all eternity.

The time of our death is uncertain. "Man knoweth not his own end: but as fishes are taken with the hook, and as birds are caught with the snare, so men are taken in the evil time, when it shall suddenly come upon them."²⁴

The young and the old, the strong and the weak, may die any hour. "One man dieth strong, and hale, rich and happy. . . . But another dieth in bitterness of soul, without any riches, and yet they shall sleep together in the dust, and worms shall cover them."²⁵

Many are overtaken by death when

²³ St. John ix, 4.

²⁴ Ecclesiastes ix, 12.

²⁵ Job xxi, 23-26.

they least expect it. The rich man in the Gospel is typical. He said to his soul: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thy rest: eat, drink, make good cheer. But God said to him: Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee: and whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?"²⁶

Death destroys all class distinction. All are equal in death. "The small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master."²⁷ The only distinction that will remain after death is that of works.

Terrible indeed is the death of the wicked: "When the wicked man is dead, there shall be no hope any more."²⁸ "The praise of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. If his pride mount

²⁶ St. Luke xii, 19-20.

²⁷ Job iii, 19.

²⁸ Proverbs xi, 7.

up even to heaven, and his head touch the clouds: In the end he shall be destroyed like a dunghill, and they that had seen him, shall say: Where is he? As a dream that fleeth away, he shall not be found. He shall pass as a vision of the night: The eyes that had seen him, shall see him no more, neither shall his place any more behold him. . . . His bones shall be filled with the vices of his youth, and they shall sleep with him in the dust.”²⁹

The just man alone can die in peace. “With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death, he shall be blessed.”³⁰ They may have borne trials and suffering in this life. “But the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the

²⁹ Job xx, 4-11.

³⁰ Ecclesiasticus i, 13.

unwise they seemed to die; and their departure was taken for misery: And their going away from us, for utter destruction: but they are in peace. And though in the sight of men they suffered torments, their hope is full of immortality. Afflicted in a few things in many they shall be well rewarded: because God hath tried them, and found them worthy of himself.”³¹

Blessed are those who in the hour of death can look back over a life well spent. Of them it is said: “Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors: for their works follow them.”³²

³¹ Wisdom iii, 1-5.

³² Apocalypse xiv, 13.

CHAPTER V.

THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT.

EVERYONE will be judged immediately after death. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment."¹ At death the time of probation ends. In that moment sentence is passed upon us. In the twinkling of an eye our fate will be decided for all eternity. God the Father has constituted Christ our Judge. "For neither doth the Father judge any man, but hath given judgment to the Son."²

Every soul must appear before Christ the moment it leaves the body. This does not mean that the souls must ascend to Heaven to be judged. Nor

¹ Epistle to the Hebrews ix, 27.

² St. John v, 22.

need Christ descend to be near each death-bed. The soul appears in an intellectual manner before the judgment seat of Christ. There is no discussion or examination of the case before the Judge. Divine Justice appears like a flash. By divine illumination the judged soul, in that moment, is enabled to see the infinite justice of the sentence that is passed upon it.

The early Fathers sometimes gave vivid descriptions of the particular judgment. They even described the guardian angels and devils as standing around the judgment seat of Christ. These they depicted as witnesses for and against the soul that was being judged. However, these were merely outbursts of eloquence. They were not intended as dogmatic expressions on the Judgment.

Yet, undoubtedly, our guardian angel accompanies the just soul to Judgment. Holy Scripture tells us this. "The

beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom."³ The burial service in the Roman Ritual says: "May the angels lead thee unto Paradise. . . . May the choir of angels receive thee."

Holy Writ makes frequent mention of the particular Judgment. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man refers to the particular Judgment. The rich man cried out: "Father, I beseech thee, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren. That he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments."⁴ If the general Judgment had been meant, the rich man could not have had five brothers living.

Christ again and again warns us that the day of our death will be the day of retribution. "Watch ye there-

³ St. Luke xvi, 22.

⁴ St. Luke xvi, 27.

fore (for you know not when the Lord of the house cometh: at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning). Lest coming on a sudden, he find you sleeping.”⁵

Christ here warns us ever to be ready, for death may overtake us at any hour of the day or night. For He says: “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh, shall find watching. . . . Be you then also ready: for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come. . . . Blessed is that servant whom when his Lord shall come, he shall find him doing as his Lord commanded.

“But if that servant shall say in his heart: My lord is long a coming: and shall begin to strike the man-servants and maid-servants, and to eat and to drink and be drunk: The Lord of that servant will come in the day that he hopeth not, and at the hour that he

⁵ St. Mark xiii, 35, 36.

knoweth not, and shall separate him, and shall appoint him his portion with unbelievers.

“And that servant who knew the will of his lord, and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. And unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required: and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more.”⁶

In this parable Christ describes the particular Judgment. We are the servants of God. We must do the will of our divine Master. We know not the hour of our death. We must be ready to undergo judgment any hour of our lives. We shall be judged according to our works and our respon-

⁶ St. Luke xii, 37-48.

sibility. Those who fill the highest places will have to answer for most.

The souls of the just enter into Heaven immediately after death. They enjoy at once the Beatific Vision. St. Paul yearns to be with God. "For in this we groan, desiring to be clothed upon with our habitation that is from heaven. . . . For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil."⁷

The Apostle also desires to be dissolved and to be with Christ.⁸ This proves conclusively that judgment takes place immediately after death. It also proves that souls enter immediately into the reward or punishment that falls to their lot.

St. Thomas says: "There are some

⁷ II Epistle to the Corinthians v, 2-10.

⁸ Epistle to the Philippians i, 23.

who say that the souls of the saints are not admitted immediately after death to the vision and presence of God. They maintain that they dwell in certain mansions until the last day. This error is refuted. For in vain would the saints rejoice and desire to depart from the body if they were not to be present with God after they depart from the flesh. Wherefore we must believe that the saints, immediately after death, see God through His essence and are in the heavenly mansion.”⁹

The Church has defined this teaching: “Souls fully cleansed from sin, even before they resume their bodies and before the general judgment, after the ascension into Heaven of our Saviour Jesus Christ, were, are, and will be in Heaven . . . and after the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ they have seen and do

⁹ In Cor. 5, lect. 2.

see the Divine Essence by intuitive vision.”¹⁰

“As those who are led out of prison,” says St. John Chrysostom, “are dragged together with their chains to judgment, so all souls when they depart hence, entangled with diverse chains of sin, are led to that terrible tribunal.”¹¹

“By the day of the Lord,” says St. Jerome, “you should understand the day of judgment or the day on which each one departs from the body. For that which happens to all on the day of judgment, will be fulfilled for each individual on the day of his death.”¹²

St. Cyprian speaks of those who will meet us in Heaven: “There a great number of loved ones will await us. Parents, brothers, sisters, a great crowd shall long for us.”¹³

St. Thomas explains the reason why

¹⁰ Denzinger, n. 530.

¹¹ Homil. 14, in Matth., n. 4.

¹² In Joel ii, 1.

¹³ Octave of All Saints, lect. 5, 6.

there is both a particular and a general Judgment: "Every man is both an individual person and also a member of the whole human race. Whence a twofold judgment is required. The one is particular. It takes place after death. Then each one receives what he has deserved by those things that he has done whilst he is in the flesh.

"Yet he does not receive all. The soul alone receives reward or punishment. The body receives nothing. The other judgment is based upon the fact that each man is a member of the human race. . . . Yet God will not judge us twice. He will not punish us twice for the same sin. For the punishment which was not completely inflicted before at judgment will be completed in the last judgment. Afterwards the wicked will be tormented in body and soul together."¹⁴

Those who die in mortal sin can

¹⁴ Suppl. q. 88, a. 1.

CHAPTER VI.

PURGATORY.

EVERY man's eternal fate is sealed at the moment of death. He is either damned or saved for all eternity. The damned enter immediately into eternal punishment. Yet not all that are saved go at once into Heaven. Those who are spotless and who have fully satisfied for their sins indeed enter immediately into eternal joy.

Others there are whose sins have been forgiven, but who have not done sufficient penance for their sins. Others again are tainted with venial sins. These go to purgatory. Here they must atone for their sins.

Purgatory is a place or state in which certain souls expiate the unremitted penalties of their sins. The

guilt of mortal sin can not be taken away in Purgatory. Venial sins indeed are wiped out. Purgatory then is a state in which souls are purified for Heaven.

After sin is forgiven there remains the obligation to do penance. "Wherefore I will judge every man according to his ways. O house of Israel, saith the Lord God. Be converted, and do penance for all your iniquities: and iniquity shall not be your ruin."¹

Christ urged the people to do penance for their sins: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say: Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."²

God requires not merely repentance and conversion, He demands works of penance. "And my people, upon whom my name is called, being converted, shall make supplication to me, and

¹ Ezechiel xviii, 30.

² St. Matthew iv, 17.

seek out my face, and do penance for their most wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins.”³ Yet sins are forgiven by repentance. “Be penitent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”⁴

God is just. He demands works of penance for our sins. He will reward these works. “For God is not unjust that he should forget your work, and the love which you have shown in his name.”⁵ Now God forgives those who turn to Him. “Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of hosts: and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of hosts.”⁶

A man may lead a life of sin and crime, yet in his last hour he may turn to God and be saved. It would not seem just for God to take this man straight to Heaven together with

³ II Paralipomenon vii, 14.

⁴ Acts of the Apostles ii, 19.

⁵ Epistle to the Hebrews vi, 10.

⁶ Zacharias i, 3.

another who has spent a long life of penance and good works. The sinner must suffer for his sins. He must wipe out the temporal punishment due to them. If the sinner does not do penance in this world, he shall pay the price in purgatory. Justice demands that it should be so.

Every man's work shall be manifest," says the Apostle; "for the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire: and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."⁷

Those who die with the guilt of venial sin on their soul also go to purgatory. Venial sins do not deprive

⁷ I Epistle to the Corinthians iii, 13-15.

the soul of sanctifying grace. Yet they are a defilement to the soul.

Everyone is guilty of some slight sin. "For there is no just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not."⁸ It is only the great saints who could avoid all venial sin. "For the just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again."⁹

Human nature is weak. "In many things we all offend."¹⁰ We must render an account for even our slightest faults. "But I say to you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account for it in the day of judgment."¹¹

Now God could not condemn the just man to hell for one slight sin. He could not cast an Apostle into eternal perdition for some little offense. He could not impose the sentence of ever-

⁸ Ecclesiastes vii, 21.

⁹ Proverbs xxiv, 16.

¹⁰ Epistle of St. James iii, 2.

¹¹ St. Matthew xii, 36.

lasting damnation on us for an idle word. Yet we must render an account for these slight faults on the day of judgment. We could not enter into Heaven with even this slight taint upon our soul.

Heaven is intended for those alone who are spotless. "There shall not enter into it anything defiled."¹² No one can enter Heaven with the slightest stain upon his soul. Hence, there remains purgatory alone. Reason demands that there be a place or state in which men who have served God may be cleansed from their slight transgressions.

Holy Writ intimates that certain sins are forgiven in the next world. Since sins can not be forgiven in Heaven or hell, they must be forgiven in purgatory. "He that shall speak against the Holy Ghost," says Christ, "it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this

¹² Apocalypse *xxi*, 27.

world, nor in the world to come.”¹³ Undoubtedly, Christ intends to say that there are sins that will not be forgiven for all eternity. Yet His manner of expression clearly indicates that certain sins may be forgiven in the next world.

Judas Machabeus offered sacrifices for the souls of the dead. “And making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. . . . It is therefore a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins.”¹⁴

In vain would Judas have offered sacrifice for souls that were in hell. Nor did they need his prayers and sacrifices if they were in heaven. The inference then is clear that these souls

¹³ St. Matthew xii, 32.

¹⁴ II Machabees xii, 43-46.

were in purgatory. Hence, we have the authority of the Holy Ghost for the existence of purgatory.

The doctrine of purgatory has been taught in the Church since the days of the Apostles. "We make oblations for the dead on their anniversary," says Tertullian . . . "if you seek from the Scriptures the precept for this and other practices you will not find it, tradition is the author of it, custom confirms it and faith observes it."¹⁵

"It can not be denied," says St. Augustine, "that the souls of the dead are relieved by the piety of the living. When the Sacrifice of the Mediator is offered for them or when alms are given for them in the Church. But these things benefit those who in their lives deserve to have these things help them. For there is a manner of life which is not so good that it does not require those things after death. Nor

¹⁵ De Corona Militis, c. 3.

is it so evil that these things would be rendered useless after death.”¹⁶

The Council of Trent urges the necessity of guarding this doctrine. “Since the Catholic Church, guided by the Holy Ghost from the sacred writings and from the tradition of the Fathers, in sacred councils and lastly in this ecumenical synod, has taught that purgatory exists and that the souls detained therein are helped by the prayers of the faithful and especially by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar, this synod commands the bishops to take diligent care that the sound doctrine of purgatory handed down by the holy Fathers and the councils be believed and held by the faithful of Christ and that it be taught and preached everywhere.

“The more difficult and subtle questions which do not conduce to the

¹⁶ *Enchiridion*, n. 110.

edification and piety of the ordinary people are to be omitted from popular discourses. Likewise uncertain things and those that bear the appearance of falsity should not be given out and discussed. They should prohibit as scandalous and as an insult to the faithful those things which relate to mere curiosity or superstition or which smack of filthy lucre.”¹⁷

Purgatory will no longer exist after the general judgment. God in His infinite wisdom will arrange so that all may atone for their sins. He can make up in intensity of suffering if time be wanting.

The doctrine of purgatory has a salutary influence upon the faithful. In an excellent degree it manifests the infinite justice, and majesty and sanctity of God. It shows what must be the glory of Paradise and what purity

¹⁷ Sess. 22, cap. 2. (Denzinger, n. 940.)

of soul is required in those who enter therein. It excites us to good works and to penance. It brings hope to the despairing sinner in his last hours. It makes us shrink even from the shadow of sin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONDITION OF THE SOULS IN
PURGATORY.

THE souls in purgatory are confirmed in justice. They possessed sanctifying grace when they passed out of this life. They can not lose this grace for all eternity. "If the tree fall to the south or the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be."¹

The souls in purgatory are free from all temptation to sin. They clearly understand the goodness of God. It is morally impossible for them even by a thought or a desire to turn away from God. They are absolutely certain of their salvation. They are secure in the knowledge of the eternal beatitude that awaits them.

¹ Ecclesiastes xi, 3.

The souls in purgatory suffer a two-fold pain. They suffer the pain of loss. This is sorrow and a sadness because they are deprived, for a time, of the Beatific Vision. They yearn to be admitted into the presence of God. Undoubtedly, the time of waiting is long and wearisome for them.

The souls in purgatory also suffer the pain of sense or feeling. This pain is probably caused by fire. This opinion is commonly accepted. However, it is not a doctrine of Faith. The Church has never decided the nature of these sufferings.

The souls in purgatory are, undoubtedly, tormented by real fire. It is not a metaphoric fire. If the souls of the damned can suffer by fire, so also can the souls in purgatory. It is commonly supposed that the demons can not torment the souls in purgatory. Yet this is merely a speculative question.

The sufferings of purgatory are, without doubt, more intense than any earthly suffering. Not all souls suffer the same intensity of pain. The intensity and duration of suffering depend upon the gravity or levity of the penalty which the soul has to pay. Then, too, the sufferings most likely are gradually diminished as the soul is more and more cleansed from its stain.

The great intensity of suffering in purgatory arises especially from the knowledge of the great loss which the souls have sustained. They realize the unspeakable joy from which they are excluded during the time of their imprisonment.

Yet the souls in purgatory possess great internal joy and peace. They know that they are saved. They realize that they are confirmed in grace and that they can not offend God with whom they are united.

Thus the souls in purgatory are

free-will prisoners. In spite of their great suffering they are perfectly contented with their lot. For them, it represents the will of an all-loving God. They can not murmur against the decrees of God. They clearly see His mercy, His goodness and His love. "It seems to me," says St. Catherine of Genoa, "that no joy can be found except the joy of the blessed in paradise that can compare with the joy of a pure soul in purgatory. The taint of sin with which they were covered is consumed by the fire of purgatory. The more it is consumed the more they partake of the Divine Light. As the stain vanishes joy grows apace. . . .

"Yet on the other hand they suffer so great pain that no tongue could describe it, no intellect could comprehend the least part of it unless God revealed it by a special grace. . . .

"God created the soul pure, simple, free from every stain of sin and en-

dowed with an inborn desire to seek God as its ultimate end. . . . As the soul draws near to the purity which it possessed at creation, this desire is expanded and constantly grows with so much force and fervor of love, impelling it on towards its last end that it can not be impeded. . . .

“So since they know so clearly how great a matter is the least hindrance and how that appetite is impeded according to the law of justice, a fire rises in them like unto the fire of hell, sin alone excepted. . . .

“The soul separated from the body, which does not possess the purity of original justice, when it sees this hindrance and knows that it can not be removed except by purgatory, at once freely casts itself into purgatory. Nay more, if it did not find this remedy to remove that impediment, a hell much more worse than purgatory would thereupon arise within it. . . .

“This I see: Paradise with no gate closed from the part of God, but he who wishes may enter. God is most pure mercy, . . . He awaits us with outstretched arms to conduct us into His glory.

“But I see something else: This Substance is of so great purity (beyond all that we can conceive) that the soul, in which there is the least note of imperfection, would prefer to suffer a thousand hells than to appear in the sight of God defiled with this stain.

“Wherefore when it knows that purgatory is intended to take away this stain, it casts itself therein and feels that it has won great mercy in that this stain can be taken away.

“I seem to see the souls in purgatory tormented especially because they see that there is something in themselves displeasing to God. They see something which they have committed against such bounty. This seems to be

greater than any other suffering they bear. They pay no heed to purgatory as a cleansing fire. The retarding of the desire enkindled in them constitutes their real purgatory.

“The love of God which abounds in the soul confers great peace upon it, so far as I see. Yet this peace does not in the least diminish the sufferings of the souls in purgatory. Nay, this love which finds itself restrained rather creates pain in them. Furthermore, the greater the love of which they are capable by the gift of God so much the greater is their pain.

“Thus the souls in purgatory have at the same time great joy and great pain, neither of which impedes the other. . . .

“If a soul should appear before God tainted with any stain it would feel that it had offered a great insult to God. It would be afflicted with greater

pain than the sufferings of ten purgatories.”²

It is not known how long souls are detained in purgatory. One thing is certain. The pains of purgatory are temporal. They will not last after the general judgment.

The Church sets no time limit to the prayers and sacrifices that are offered for the dead. Hence, we have not even an approximate idea of how long individual souls must suffer in purgatory. It is, however, certain that some souls must suffer for longer time than others.

² Purgatory, chap. II-XIV. (Pesch.)

CHAPTER VIII.

PRAYER FOR THE SOULS IN PURGATORY.

“**I** BELIEVE in . . . the communion of saints,” says the Apostles’ Creed. This is one of the most consoling doctrines of the Church. It establishes tender relations amongst all the countless multitudes of faithful Christians whether living or dead.

The saints in Heaven pray for those who are struggling on earth and for those who are suffering in purgatory. The souls in purgatory pray for their brethren on earth. The faithful on earth venerate the blessed in Heaven and pray for the suffering souls in purgatory.

This doctrine shows the depth and the breadth of the love which Christ established amongst His followers. It

proclaims the true meaning of the universal brotherhood of man. "Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners," says St. Paul, "but you are fellow citizens with the saints and the domestics of God."¹

The Church has always offered prayers and sacrifices for her beloved dead. The earliest inscriptions found in the Catacombs attest to this fact. Holy Scripture makes at least one clear reference to the practice of praying for the dead. "It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins."²

"Funeral pomp and magnificent parades and sumptuous burial and the construction of rich monuments may furnish some consolation for the living," says St. Augustine, "but they do not help the dead. There is no question

¹ Epistle to the Ephesians ii, 19.

² II Machabees xii, 46.

however but they are helped by the prayers of Holy Church, and by the salutary Sacrifice, and by the alms which are offered for their spirits. Through these things God is more merciful toward them than their sins would have deserved.

“This custom has been handed down by the Fathers and is observed by the universal Church. Commemoration and prayer is made in the Sacrifice itself for those who have died in the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Sacrifice is also offered for them. Now who can doubt that they are assisted by the works of mercy which are offered for them, since prayers to God for them are not vainly appointed? There is no doubt whatever that these benefit the dead.

“However, they benefit those only who have so lived before death that these things can be useful to them after death. For in vain will any works of

piety be offered for those who have died without 'faith that worketh by charity'³ and its Sacraments.

"Such are those who when they were here did not possess fidelity. Either they did not receive it or they received the grace of God in vain. Thus they laid up for themselves not mercy but anger. Wherefore, no new merits are gained for the dead by their friends. Rather these benefits are given to them as a consequence of their preceding merits."⁴

When St. Monica was dying she said to her son, St. Augustine, "Do not be solicitous about this body, bury it anywhere. This alone I beg you that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you be."⁵

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the most efficacious means for helping

³ Epistle to the Galatians v, 6.

⁴ Sermon, c. lxxii, n. 2.

⁵ Confessions, ix, 27.

the souls of the faithful departed. The Holy Sacrifice is offered for them after the manner of prayer. Prayers, good works, deeds of penance, and almsgiving may also be offered up for the benefit of our departed brethren.

Even one who is in sin can help the souls in purgatory by works which do not depend upon his spiritual condition for their merit. One who is not in the state of grace can offer the Sacrifice of the Mass. He can also perform other works that have merit in themselves or from the intention of the Church. These benefit the souls to which they are applied.

Prayers and good works benefit those for whom they are offered. Undoubtedly, the amount of benefit the different souls derive, depends upon the previous disposition of those for whom the good works are offered. Thus one who had shown little charity during his life would scarcely receive as much

benefit as would a person who had spent his life in works of love.

Prayers can never benefit the souls of the damned. Certain prayers of the Church might give rise to false ideas in this. "Free, O Lord, the souls of the faithful departed from the pains of hell," says the Missal. In these words the Church prays for these souls as if they were about to depart from the body. She is asking God to bring them to His heavenly home which means to take them away from hell.

Neither can our prayers help the blessed in Heaven. We may indeed pray for one who is in Heaven, thinking that perhaps he is in purgatory. Yet these prayers are not in vain. God will apply them to other souls or accept them for our own merit.

The fruits of the Mass are infinite. When Mass is offered for a soul in purgatory, God applies to that soul

whatever of these fruits He sees fit. Special Masses are contained in the Missal for the dead. They are called Requiem Masses. A special Requiem Mass is assigned for the day of burial, for the third, seventh and thirtieth day after death and also for the anniversary of death.

The souls in purgatory certainly pray for their friends and dear ones on earth. They probably know our struggles in a general way.

“The souls of the dead can have concern for the living,” says St. Thomas, “even though they do not know their condition. In the same manner we have concern for the dead even though we do not know their condition. Of themselves they do not possess information concerning the living. Yet they may obtain this information from souls that have gone to them from earth, or through the angels or

devils. Or, perhaps, the spirit of God reveals it to them.”⁶

Undoubtedly the souls can also pray for themselves. They can beg God to inspire the faithful to help them. They can also invoke the assistance of the blessed in Heaven.

Consoling indeed is the doctrine of purgatory. Because of this tender doctrine, death can not break the bonds of love between us and our loved ones. Whilst they suffered on earth it was our joy to perform acts of love and tenderness for them. Now that they are gone we may still show them our love. We can offer prayers and good works for them. We can have the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered for them. And Holy Faith teaches us that they profit by these deeds of ours. The power of love thus extends beyond the grave. For all pure love is eternal.

⁶ Summa Theol. I, q. 89, a. 8 ad 1.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF THE WORLD.

THE General Judgment will take place on the last day of the world. On that day the world will come to an end. The whole human race will be wiped from the face of the earth.

No one knows when the world will come to an end. "Of that day and hour no man knoweth, no, not the the angels of heaven, but the Father alone."¹ The last day will come when men least expect it. It is called the day of the Lord. Then Jesus Christ will come to judge all men that have ever lived on earth.

"You yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord shall so come, as a thief in the night."² "The Lord de-

¹ St. Matthew xxiv, 36.

² I Epistle to the Thessalonians v, 2.

layeth not his promise, as some imagine.
. . . But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth and the works which are in it, shall be burnt up.”³

Revelation contains nothing to indicate when the world will come to an end. It may take place tomorrow. Or it may take place thousands of years hence. Christ Himself is silent upon this question. “Of that day and hour no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father.”⁴ “This is so expressed,” says St. Augustine, “because men are not to learn this through the Son, but not as though He Himself did not know it.”⁵

Many signs will precede the end of

³ II Epistle of St. Peter iii, 9, 10.

⁴ St. Mark xiii, 32.

⁵ In Psalmos vi.

the world. Christ has left us a prophecy concerning these signs. At the same time He foretold the destruction of the Temple. The Temple was indeed destroyed according to the letter of His prophecy.

“And when he was sitting on Mount Olivet, the disciples came to him privately, saying: Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of their coming, and of the consummation of the world? And Jesus answering said to them: Take heed that no man seduce you: For many will come in my name saying, I am Christ: and they will seduce many. And you shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars. See that you be not troubled. For these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be pestilences, and famines, and earthquakes, in places.

Now all these things are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall put you to death; and you shall be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

“And then shall many be scandalized; and shall betray one another: and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall seduce many. And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold. But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.

“And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come.

“When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of by Daniel,⁶ the prophet, standing in the holy place, he that readeth, let him understand. . . .

⁶ Daniel ix, 27.

“For there shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be. . . .

“And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty.

“And he shall send his angels with a trumpet, and a great voice: and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them.”⁷

Christ predicts that there shall be

⁷ St. Matthew **xxiv**, 3-31.

wars and rumors of wars before the world comes to an end. There will be famine and pestilence. The Church will be persecuted. There will be many false religions throughout the world. Many will abandon the Faith. Men will be selfish. Iniquity will abound. At that time, the Gospel shall have been preached to all nations of earth. It does not follow that all nations will then be Christian. Nations may have accepted the Gospel and later rejected it. Nor does it mean that all men will have been converted to Christianity.

Antichrist will come before the end of the world. "Little children," says St. John, "it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist cometh: even now there are many antichrists: whereby we know that it is the last hour."⁸

By antichrist is undoubtedly meant

⁸ I Epistle of St. John ii, 18.

some powerful adversary of Christ. From the beginning Christ has had many adversaries. Yet some notorious and remarkable person will arise at the last to battle against the Church.

St. Paul calls him "the man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth, and is lifted up above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, so that he sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself as if he were God. . . .

"And then that wicked one shall be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall kill in the spirit of his mouth: and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: him, whose coming is according to the working of satan, in all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and in all seduction of iniquity to them that perish: because they received not the love of truth that they might be saved. Therefore, God shall send them the operation of error, to believe lying: that all may be judged

who have not believed the truth, but have consented to iniquity.”⁹

St. John tells us that antichrist will deny Christ: “Who is a liar, but he who denieth that Jesus is the Christ. This is antichrist, who denieth the Father and the Son.”¹⁰

St. Cyril of Jerusalem says that the devil will send a man who will set himself up as Christ. Satan “will raise up a magician who will falsely declare himself Christ. . . . The Jews who are expecting the Messias will be deceived through him.”¹¹ As St. Paul says, antichrist will declare himself God and will work many deceptive miracles.

The Apocalypse describes antichrist as a repulsive beast with the power of speech. He is to be a cruel persecutor of the Church, possessing great

⁹ Epistle to the Thessalonians ii, 5-11.

¹⁰ I Epistle of St. John ii, 22.

¹¹ Catech., n. 15. (Pesch.)

political power. He is to rule over all the nations of earth, it would seem, for three years and a half.

“And all the earth was in admiration after the beast. And they adored the dragon, which gave power to the beast: and they adored the beast, saying: Who is like the beast? and who shall be able to fight with him? And there was given him a mouth speaking great things, and blasphemies: and power was given him to do two and forty months, and he opened his mouth unto blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

“And it was given him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. And power was given him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation.”¹²

Atheism, pantheism and materialism will grow apace in the last day. When

¹² Apocalypse xiii, 3-7.

they have reached their height, then will antichrist appear. There will be great apostasy from the Faith. Yet the Church will not be destroyed. Those who remain true to Christ will not adore the beast. "All that dwell upon the earth, adored him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb."¹³

Public worship will doubtless be abolished: "And from the time when the continual sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination unto desolation shall be set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred ninety days."¹⁴ According to this prophecy, the Mass will be abolished three years and a half before the end.

During the persecution of antichrist, Elias and Henoch will come: "And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy (preach) a thou-

¹³ Apocalypse xiii, 8.

¹⁴ Daniel xii, 11.

sand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. . . .

“And when they have finished their testimony, the beast, that ascendeth out of the abyss, shall make war upon them, and shall overcome them, and shall kill them. . . .

“And after three days and a half, the spirit of God entereth into them. And they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell upon them that saw them . . . and they went up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies saw them.”¹⁵

The prophet Malachias says: “Behold, I will send you Elias, the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers: lest I come, and strike the earth with anathema.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Apocalypse xi, 3-II.

¹⁶ Malachias iv, 5, 6.

Henoch is mentioned also as coming to preach penance: "Henoch pleased God and was translated into paradise, that he may give repentance to the nations."¹⁷

The Jews will be converted to Christ before the end of the world. St. Paul clearly foretells this. "Blindness in part has happened in Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written: 'There shall come out of Sion, he that shall deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them:'¹⁸ when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, indeed, they are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, they are most dear for the sake of the fathers."¹⁹

Our Lord describes the harrowing

¹⁷ Ecclesiasticus xlv, 16.

¹⁸ Isaias lix, 20-21.

¹⁹ Epistle to the Romans xi, 25-28.

events that will take place on the last day: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars: and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves. Men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the world.

"For the powers of heaven shall be moved. And they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty."²⁰

In vain might we try to reckon the time when the world will come to an end. "That which Christ was unwilling to make known to the Apostles who questioned Him," says St. Thomas, "He will not reveal to others. Hence all those that have attempted to compute the time foretold have proved to be falsifiers.

"For certain ones," as St. Augustine

²⁰ St. Luke xxi, 25, 27.

says,²¹ “said that it would be four hundred years from the ascension of the Lord to His last coming. Others five hundred, others a thousand. The falsity of their assertions is obvious, and so it will be with those who to this day continue to compute.”²²

Neither does it avail us to try to analyze accurately the character of the signs and wonders that will take place before the last day.

Nothing tends more to elevate our hearts to God than the thought that the world and all its grandeur will pass away. Every man that contemplates this great truth understands the sentiments of the Psalmist: “Behold, thou hast made my days measurable: and my substance is as nothing before thee, and indeed all things are vanity.”²³

²¹ *De Civitate Dei* i, 18, c. 53.

²² *Suppl. q. 73, a. I, ad I.*

²³ *Psalm xxxviii, 6.*

Our hope is in eternity. This material world will pass away as a flower withered by the sun. "The world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth the will of God, abideth forever."²⁴

Fearful indeed will the end be to those who fail to do the will of God. It is to the wicked that the prophet says: "Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is near. . . . And I will visit the evils of the world and against the wicked for their iniquity: And I will make the pride of infidels to cease, and will bring down the arrogance of the mighty."²⁵

²⁴ I Epistle of St. John ii, 17.

²⁵ Isaias xiii, 6-11.

CHAPTER X.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

“**I** BELIEVE in the . . . resurrection of the dead,” says the Apostles’ Creed. The dead will all rise again at the second coming of Christ. The souls of all that have ever lived upon earth will be united again to their bodies. Even those bodies that for centuries have been scattered to the winds as dust, will return to life.

“The hour cometh wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. And they that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life; but they have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.”¹

Christ says: “This is the will of

¹ St. John v, 28, 29.

my Father that sent me; that everyone who seeth the Son, and believeth in him, may have life everlasting, and I will raise him up in the last day.”²

When Lazarus died, Martha hurried off to meet our Saviour. “Jesus said to her: Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith to him: I know that he shall rise again, in the resurrection, at the last day.”³

The doctrine of the resurrection is a fundamental dogma of Faith. Christ defended this doctrine against the Sadducees. “That day there came to him the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection. And asked him, saying: Master, Moses said: If a man die having no son, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up issue to his brother.

“Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first having mar-

² St. John vi, 40.

³ St. John xi, 23, 24.

ried a wife, died; and not having issue, left his wife to his brother. In like manner, the second, and the third, and so on to the seventh. And last of all, the woman died also. At the resurrection, therefore, whose wife shall she be? For they all had her.

“And Jesus answering, said to them: You err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection, they shall neither marry nor be married: but shall be as the angels of God in heaven. And concerning the resurrection, have you not read that which was spoken by God, saying to you: I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”⁴

St. Paul stoutly affirms the doctrine of the resurrection. “The Lord himself shall come down from heaven with commandment. And with the voice

⁴ St. Matthew *xxii*, 23-32.

of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God; And the dead who are in Christ, shall rise first.”⁵

The Apostle bases all Faith upon the resurrection of Christ. He then bases the resurrection of all men on the resurrection of Christ. “Now if Christ be preached that he rose again from the dead,” said he, “how do some among you say, that there is no resurrection of the dead: But if there be no resurrection of the dead; then Christ is not risen again.

“And if Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have given testimony against God, that he hath raised up Christ: whom he hath not raised up, if the dead rise not again.

“For if the dead rise not again, neither is Christ risen again. And if

⁵ I Epistle to the Thessalonians iv, 15.

Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain. . . . And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. . . .

“If (according to men) I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me, if the dead rise not again? . . . But some man will say: How do the dead rise again? or with what manner of body shall they come? senseless man, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die first.

“And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be: but bare grain as of wheat, or of some of the rest. But God giveth it a body: and to every seed its proper body. . . .

“All flesh is not the same flesh. . . . And there are celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial. . . . So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it shall rise in glory. It is sown in

weakness, it shall rise in power. It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body. . . .

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall all indeed rise again: but we shall not all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again incorruptible; and we shall be changed.

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality. And when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’⁶ O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?”⁷

Thus the sacred Scriptures define the doctrine of the resurrection in all its details. We shall rise to a new state. There will be no marriage. No more

⁶ Osee xiii, 14.

⁷ I Epistle to the Corinthians xv, 12-55.

children will be born. We shall be like the angels, not in nature, but in condition. We shall be changed.

Our bodies will be fitted for the new conditions in which we shall be placed. They will be incorruptible and immortal. They will arise from our corrupted bodies as the plant rises from the seed sown in the ground.

Very many passages of Holy Writ mention the resurrection of the dead.

The Old Testament also abounds in such references. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," says Holy Job, "and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God."⁸

The valiant Machabean martyr cried out with his last breath: "Thou indeed, O wicked man, destroyest us out of this present life: but the king of the

⁸ Job xix, 25, 26.

world will raise us up, who die for his laws, in the resurrection of eternal life.”⁹

The noble mother of the Machabees thus addressed her seven sons as they were led forth to death: “I know not how you were formed in my womb: for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you. But the Creator of the world, that formed the nativity of man, and that found out the origin of all, he will restore you again, in his mercy, both breath and life.”¹⁰

Judas Machabeus “making a gathering, he sent twelve thousand drachms of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for the sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it should have seemed

⁹ II Machabees vii, 9.

¹⁰ II Machabees vii, 22, 23.

superfluous and vain to pray for the dead.)”¹¹

Resurrection pertains to the supernatural order. It is a miracle of God’s love and power. The idea of the resurrection is in perfect accord with reason. God made man with both soul and body. Without the body man is not in the condition which his nature demands. He exists for beatitude. It is then but proper that the complete man should enjoy this beatitude. He suffers in his body on earth. He should then rejoice in his body in Heaven. He sins in his body on earth. It is but proper that he should be punished in his body in eternity.

Each of us will receive his own body at the resurrection. Yet our bodies will be changed in many ways. Infants will rise as fully developed human beings. The just who were aged and decrepit will rise filled with the fresh-

¹¹ II Machabees xii, 43, 44.

ness of youth. All physical ills and deformities will disappear in the just.

St. Thomas says: "Numerically the same body will arise. . . . For it can not be called resurrection unless the soul returns to the same body. For resurrection is to rise again. It is the rising and falling of one and the same thing. Hence resurrection refers rather to the body than to the soul, which lives after death. Thus if we should not receive the same body, it would not be called resurrection, but the taking of a new body."¹²

God will gather together the atoms of our bodies on the last day and form them again into the body which He once formed for us through the course of nature. Some see a difficulty in the fact that the same matter may have entered into the composition of several bodies.

It is not improbable that matter

¹² Supplement, q. 79, a. 1.

from one human body in course of time, after assuming different changes, sometimes become part of another human body. St. Thomas answers: "If this fact does not interfere with the identity of human bodies in this life, neither will it interfere with their identity at the resurrection. The human body in this life is continually changing the material of which it is composed. . . .

"Though man is identically the same at the resurrection, it is not necessary that he reassume all the material that formed his body during the different stages of his life. Only such portion is required as will suffice to make up the due form of the body. If a sufficient quantity is lacking, either because the person was overtaken by death before nature developed the quantity required, or because he was deprived of a member, God can supply it. . . .

“Hence, it is clear that it should not shake our faith in the resurrection even though one man should eat another’s flesh. . . . The eaten flesh will rise in him in whom it was first perfected by a rational soul.

“The other, if he has not lived solely on human flesh, could rise from the other assumed material such as will be necessary for the due quantity of his body. If he has lived on human flesh alone, he will rise in the body in which he was born and the omnipotence of God will supply whatever is wanting.”¹³

It matters little in what part of the world we shall rise. But it is commonly supposed that we shall rise wherever our bodies are found.

Christ will send His angels to call us. “And he shall send his angels with a trumpet, and a great voice; and they shall gather together his elect

¹³ *Contra Gentiles* l. 4, c. 81.

from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them.”¹⁴

This will be, undoubtedly, a real voice and a material trumpet. For it is to call real and material bodies back to life. The dead bodies will hear and obey this voice as “the wind and the sea obeyed Christ.”¹⁵

Our hope is in the resurrection. Life is dear to us. It is sweet to look forward to the time when we shall be clothed again with our bodies which will then be immortal.

The day of resurrection will be a day of exceeding great joy for many. It will also be a day of bitter anguish and despair for many. “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne, and the books were opened: and another book

¹⁴ St. Matthew xxiv, 31.

¹⁵ St. Mark iv, 40.

was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it . . . and they were judged every one according to their works.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Apocalypse **xx**, 12, 13.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

“**I**N THE last day of the world Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. This will be the second coming of Christ. At His first coming He came as a helpless child in poverty and obscurity. At the second coming He will appear in great splendor.

“Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn: and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with much power and majesty.”¹ Christ will be accompanied by many angels. “And when the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty.

¹ St. Matthew xxiv, 30.

“And all nations shall be gathered before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right but the goats on his left.”²

All that have ever dwelt upon the earth will be gathered there before the judgment seat of Christ. It is believed by many that the general judgment will take place in the Valley of Jehosaphat. However, this is not a doctrine of the Church.

This belief is based upon the words of the prophet: “I will gather together all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehosaphat. . . . Let them rise, and let the nations come up into the valley of Jehosaphat: for there I will sit, to judge all nations round about.”³

² St. Matthew **xxiv**, 31-33.

³ Joel **iii**, 2-12.

“Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.”⁴ The Fathers agree that this is the sign of the cross. The cross will appear in the sky as a sign of Christ’s coming. The Church says in a prayer: “This sign of the cross will be in the heavens when the Lord shall come to judge.”⁵

Christ will come in the form of man. He will come in the clouds. The angels said to the Apostles who had watched Christ ascend into the clouds: “This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen him going into heaven.”⁶

The Apostles will sit in judgment with Christ. “And Jesus said to them: Amen, I say to you, that you who have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the seat of his majesty, you shall

⁴ St. Matthew xxiv, 30.

⁵ Missal, 30th of May.

⁶ Acts of the Apostles i, 11.

sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”⁷

All men will be judged. “And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hell gave up their dead that were in them: and they were judged every one according to their works.”⁸

All indeed will have been judged at the moment of death. Sentence will have been passed upon them by God. This is an everlasting and unchangeable sentence. It must stand for all eternity. For God can not change His decrees. At the general judgment this sentence will be made public to the whole human race. The justice of God will be made manifest.

Everyone will be judged according to his life. His deeds, his words and his very thoughts will be revealed to the great concourse of humanity. “And

⁷ St. Matthew **xix**, 28.

⁸ Apocalypse **xx**, 13.

all things that are done, God will bring into judgment for every error, whether it be good or evil.”⁹

Nothing shall be hidden on that day. Even the secrets of men’s hearts will be revealed. “Therefore judge not before the time,” says the Apostle, “until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”¹⁰

Even the sins of the blessed will be revealed. Yet the blessed will have no cause for shame. Nor will their friends blame them. The splendor of repentance and satisfaction will take away all ugliness and repulsion from their sins.

The just will, undoubtedly, rejoice when their sins are revealed to the world. For the greater and more shameful their sins the more will the

⁹ Ecclesiastes xii, 14.

¹⁰ I Epistle to the Corinthians iv, 5.

goodness and mercy and justice of God appear. Thus they will rejoice in the glory that is given to God when their sins are revealed. They will not be like criminals that have been simply acquitted of their crime. All effects of their sins will have been blotted out. There will remain nothing but the fact of sin. This fact will remain for all eternity. Hence, since they are to be perfectly happy, the mere fact of their sins could not cause them the slightest confusion.

The just can not even feel sorry for having committed sin. For "there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."¹¹

Hence, the repentant sinner will rejoice at least as much as those who never sinned.

Christ will separate the good from

¹¹ St. Luke xv, 1, 7.

the wicked. He will place the good on His right and the wicked on His left. Then He will pass sentence upon them.

“Not that the Judge will question each one of us. Not that those who are being judged will answer Him. . . . But it is most likely that by some ineffable power every action of our life will be imprinted on a kind of tablet which will manifest the memory of things past to our soul. . . . For what else do the books, mentioned by Daniel, signify than that the Lord will excite in the memory of men the appearance and image of their deeds, so that each will recall his actions, so that we ourselves may see why we are involved?”¹²

The deeds of every man could scarcely be recounted by words. It would take centuries to complete the judgment in this manner. Hence, when

¹² St. Basil in Joan., i, 18.

Christ passes sentence, He does so by a direct action on the minds of all. It is, undoubtedly, thus the words mentioned in the Gospel are to be understood.

Christ will say to the just: "Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."¹³ Then He will say to the wicked: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels."¹⁴

As soon as sentence has been passed it will be executed. The just will ascend immediately into Heaven with Christ. The wicked will be hurled into hell.

It is hard to comprehend the awful solemnity of the last judgment. It will then be too late to make excuses. The day of God's mercy will have

¹³ St. Matthew xxv, 34.

¹⁴ St. Matthew xxv, 41.

passed. Justice alone will rule on that day.

Not even the infinite love of God will avail the sinner aught on that terrible day. "Then shall all tribes of the earth mourn."¹⁵ Yet the wicked alone shall mourn. The just will rejoice with boundless joy.

Then will the sinner realize the folly of his ways. Hope will be dead forever. He will sink into the unspeakable anguish of eternal despair. "Depart from me, you cursed," has been spoken. The awful terror of those words will freeze his heart and will ring in his ears forever.

Boundless will be the joy of the just. Friends and loved ones will gather together by the side of Christ. With Him they will ascend to the realms of endless bliss. There they will be united with Him in love and happiness for all eternity.

¹⁵ St. Matthew xxiv, 30.

CHAPTER XII.

HELL.

AFTER the general judgment Heaven and hell alone will remain. The world will have come to an end. Purgatory will have ceased to be. The just will be taken up to Heaven where they will enjoy endless bliss with God. Those who have died in mortal sin will be cast into hell where they will suffer unspeakable torments for all eternity.

At the last judgment Christ will say to the wicked: "Depart from me, you accursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . And these shall go into everlasting punishment."¹

The place of suffering is called hell:

¹ St. Matthew xxv, 41-46.

“Fear him that can destroy body and soul in hell.”² The body will suffer with the soul after the general judgment: “It is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that the whole body should go into hell.”³

Those who refuse to do the will of God on earth will suffer eternal punishment. They will be separated from God: “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with the angels of his power: In a flame of fire, yielding vengeance to them who know not God, and who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall suffer eternal punishment in destruction, from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”⁴

Hell will be, as it were, a second death for the wicked: “But the fear-

² St. Matthew x, 28.

³ St. Matthew v, 30.

⁴ II Epistle to the Thessalonians i, 7-9.

ful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars, they shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”⁵

Hell exists even now. Those who have died in mortal sin are already in hell. The souls of the wicked will suffer in hell until the general judgment. Afterwards body and soul will suffer together.

Hell is called the infernal regions. The Latin term is “*infernus*.” In Greek it is called “*hades*.” In Hebrew it is called “*sheol*.” These terms all signify a place where dwell the souls of the dead. Jacob cried out: “I will go down to my son in hell, mourning.”⁶

Sheol is sometimes described as a

⁵ Apocalypse *xxi*, 8.

⁶ Genesis *xxxvii*, 35.

place under the earth: "But if the Lord do a new thing, and the earth opening her mouth, swallow them down, and all things that belong to them, and they go down alive into hell, you shall know that they have blasphemed the Lord."⁷

Hell as the abode of the damned is also called "Gehenna."

"A valley near Jerusalem was called Gehenna. Here the idolatrous Israelites sometimes sacrificed their children to the idol Moloch. Wherefore King Josias polluted the place by casting into it dead bodies and all kinds of, unclean things.⁸ This valley was converted into a place of abomination. Hence, it happened that the place of horror in which the damned suffer, because of its resemblance to this, is called Gehenna. This name for hell

⁷ Numbers xvi, 30.

⁸ IV Kings xxiii, 10.

was in common use at the time of Christ.”⁹

The idea of hell is repugnant to the human mind. In the same manner we shrink from the thought of death. Yet both hell and death are realities. God is just. He has given us a law. Justice demands that He reward those who keep His law. He can not be indifferent as to whether men break or observe His law. He commands all men to keep His law. Hence, justice demands that He punish those who break it.

“God is just,” says St. John Chrysostom. “This we all admit whether Jew or Gentile or heretic or Christian. Yet many sinners depart this life unpunished. Many who lead virtuous lives finally die after having undergone six hundred calamities. Wherefore, since God is just, where will He re-

⁹ Ch. Pesch. *Prael. Dogm.*, vol. IX, p. 315, ed. tertia Herder, 1911.

ward these just ones and punish these wicked ones if there is no hell, no resurrection?"¹⁰

Every law must have its sanction. There must be a reward for those who observe it and a penalty for those who transgress it. Yet there is no sanction for God's law on earth. Those who despise God's law on earth often enjoy the greatest pleasures of this life. Those who keep it often lead lives of misery and suffering.

Retribution can only be made after death. There must be both reward and punishment after death. "If in this life only we have hope," says St. Paul, "we are of all men most miserable."¹¹

True virtue brings peace to the heart. It often fills the soul with the joy of a good conscience. Vice, too, sometimes brings remorse and mental

¹⁰ Homilia 6 in Phil., n. 6.

¹¹ I Epistle to the Corinthians xv, 19.

anguish. This is the voice of conscience. Yet these inner feelings would constitute a poor reward for those faithful souls who lead long lives of privation and bitterness.

The passing pangs of the wicked would be a slight penalty indeed for long years of depravity and sin. With this as the sole punishment for evil, the whole world would soon become depraved. Well might men steal, well might they oppress their fellow man, well might they debauch if they had no more to fear than the shadow of remorse that might flit across their minds.

The wicked "have said, reasoning with themselves, but not right: The time of our life is short and tedious, and in the end of a man, there is no remedy. . . .

"Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in

youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments. . . .

“Let none of us go without his part in luxury. . . . Let us oppress the poor, just man, and not spare the widows, nor honor the ancient grey hairs of the aged. But let our own strength be the law of justice: for that which is feeble, is found to be nothing worth. . . .

“These things they thought and were deceived: for their own malice blinded them. And they knew not the secrets of God, nor hoped for the wages of justice, nor esteemed the honor of holy souls.”¹²

If there is no hell then the laws of all civilized nations are unjust. If God can not punish sin, neither should nations punish crime. Yet to take away all punishment for crime would destroy the whole social order.

¹² Wisdom ii, 1-22.

Laws without a penalty for those who break them are absurd. They are mere formalities which anyone may use at will. Penalty for its infraction belongs to the very essence of a law. Hence, if there is no hell, there is no law of God. There is no moral order. There is no religion. For religion binds men to God. Without a law there can be no bond between God and man.

God does not create men for hell. Nor does He cast anyone into eternal punishment. Those who are damned go into hell willfully and knowingly.

“For God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. For he created all things, that they might be: and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor kingdom of hell upon the earth. For justice is perpetual and immortal.”¹³

¹³ Wisdom i, 13-15.

God created us for eternal happiness. He loves us with an eternal love. If we rebel against Him and incur eternal punishment, God will still love that which He has made to His Own image and likeness. For though we may fail to do His will we can not thwart His love.

CHAPTER XIII.

ETERNAL DAMNATION IN HELL.

THE punishment of hell is eternal. The wicked will suffer forever. "And the smoke of their torments shall ascend up forever."¹ No one can ever be released from hell. The day of repentance is passed for the damned. The gates of God's mercy are closed to them forever.

It is difficult for poor human reason to comprehend how God can allow His creatures to suffer torments for all eternity. It would seem that a million years of suffering would suffice. We would expect a loving God to relax at some time the rigors of eternal damnation.

To us it seems the groaning and

¹ Apocalypse xiv, 11.

weeping that arise eternally from the depths of hell would move the heart of God to have pity on the wretched souls of the damned. Yet justice is as cold as stone. God rules the universe with justice and with wisdom. Divine mercy is infinite. Yet it is governed by infinite wisdom. Mercy must never destroy justice.

God has warned all men that if they do not keep His law they will suffer eternal punishment. Christ Himself warns us that He will say to the wicked on the last day: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire."² God does not will that any of His creatures shall suffer the torments of hell.

"As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: and why will you die, O

² St. Matthew xxv, 41.

house of Israel?"³ No one ever goes to hell except through his own free choice.

God says to each soul that He sends into this world: "Consider that I have set before thee this day life and good, and on the other hand, death and evil: That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways and keep his commandments and ceremonies and judgments, and thou mayest live. . . .

"But if thy heart be turned away . . . I foretell thee this day that thou shalt perish . . . I call heaven and earth to witness this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing."⁴

God expends boundless mercy to save sinners. Christ became man to redeem mankind from sin. God is ever ready to receive His erring chil-

³ Ezechiel xxxiii, 11.

⁴ Deuteronomy xxx, 15-19.

dren. "Return to me and I will return to you, saith the Lord of hosts."⁵

Those who commit mortal sin turn away from God. They rebel against Him. God warns them of the punishment they will incur. He pleads with them to abandon their sin. He is patient with them. He gives them the grace of repentance. He tells them that according to His unchangeable decrees it will be impossible to repent after death.

The sinner knows that if he does not return to God in this life he will be separated from Him forever. In spite of all God's warnings and graces the sinner refuses to repent. He goes obstinately to his destruction. God simply looks upon him with divine pity and says: "You will not come to me, that you may have life."⁶

God had, as it were, labored to win

⁵ Malachias iii, 7.

⁶ St. John v, 40.

sinners back to Himself: "Thus saith the Lord: Stand ye on the ways, and see, and ask for old paths, which is the good way, and walk ye in it: and you shall find refreshment for your souls. And they said: We will not walk. And I appointed watchmen over you, saying: Hearken ye to the sound of the trumpet. And they said: We will not hearken."⁷

The damned are spiritual suicides. They have destroyed a life which they can never restore. They reject eternal life and choose eternal death. They are led into this sad plight by their own pride and presumption.

"Say not," says the Holy Ghost to the sinner, "I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder. . . . And say not: The mercy of the Lord is great; he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins. For mercy and

⁷ Jeremias vi, 16, 17.

wrath quickly come from him, and his wrath looketh upon sinners."⁸

Holy Writ attributes wrath, anger and vengeance to God. Yet it does so by way of analogy. God can not feel anger or revenge. These expressions signify that God is acting according to the rigor of justice.

It is clear that man procures his own damnation. His own malice and impenitence lead him into hell. Yet our understanding has been darkened. We can not comprehend the rigors of divine justice. We feel that God should in some manner use His omnipotence to liberate the souls of sinners from hell. This would be sentimental justice.

Sentimentality destroys justice. Our modern courts sometimes become ridiculous by their maudlin sentimentality. It is a sign of weakness. No nation can be governed by sentimentalism. Much

⁸ Ecclesiasticus v, 4-7.

less could God rule the universe by this feeble standard.

There would seem to be a disproportion between the sin and the punishment. The sin may have been committed in a single moment. Yet the penalty is eternal damnation. The same difficulty arises in human courts of justice. In a twinkling of the eye a man commits murder. He is sentenced to life imprisonment or to death. True, he may be acquitted if sentimentalism has its way.

Often the tenderest judge must pass the cruel sentence of death upon a prisoner. His feelings, undoubtedly, prompt him to remit this awful penalty. Yet justice must be done. He is not acting for the benefit of this single individual. He is seeking to procure the good of society. So it is with God. In all His judgments He acts for the welfare of humanity.

It has been held that in the end all

will be made equal. Some even suppose that the devil himself will be converted at the end of the world. Yet there must be an essential difference between good and evil.

If the just and the unjust are to be made equal, then virtue and crime will be finally placed in the same class. Virtue and crime would eventually receive the same reward. The wicked would simply have to wait longer than the just for their reward. Hence, the maintenance of the moral order requires the doctrine of eternal punishment.

It is well known that those who choose lives of wickedness generally strive to deny the existence of hell. For it is difficult to understand how any reasonable person can deliberately remain in sin if he believes in eternal punishment.

Nothing other than eternal punishment could effectually deter men from

sin. Any temporal punishment beyond the grave would be weak before the allurements of sin. It is an evil not present. They would make light of it. Virtue would soon decay on the earth. "In all thy works," says Holy Writ, "remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."⁹

⁹ Ecclesiasticus vii, 40.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SUFFERING OF THE DAMNED IN
HELL.

THE sufferings of the damned are twofold. They suffer both the pain of loss and the pain of sense or feeling. The most terrible sentence that God can utter is this: "Depart from me, you cursed."¹ The creature must depart from his Creator never more to return. Man must be separated from his God for all eternity.

Man was created to dwell with God in love and endless joy. Yet now an infinite abyss will exist forever between him and his God. Never shall he for one moment enjoy the Beatific Vision. Never will those yearnings of his heart for God be satisfied.

¹ St. Matthew xxv, 41.

On earth man has felt the dreariness of life without God. From his birth he inherited a ceaseless desire to be united with God. Hope had lingered in his heart until death came.

But now he shall never again know hope. He must depart from his heavenly Father. He must abandon all hope of ever reaching his eternal destiny. He must set out upon a dismal way that knows no turning. If he might but hope to be united with God after ten millions of years he might still escape eternal despair.

Yet if he peer into the future and count multiplied millions of years he still sees no ending. His doom is sealed forever. There is no reckoning of eternity. It is not divided into periods. It is endless duration.

If we count every drop of water in the ocean and every grain of sand on the seashore as a thousand years it would still be as nothing compared to

eternity. The longest period of time that could be reckoned would not constitute one tiny part of eternity. For eternity has no parts.

It is impossible to describe the sorrow and sadness of those who are doomed to eternal separation from God. Concentrate all the bitterness and sorrow of the whole human race into one single heart. Heap upon one single soul all the misery and despair that humanity has ever known. Fill one single bosom with every pang of grief and woe that has been experienced by all creatures of earth from the beginning to the end of time. It were all insignificant compared to the unspeakable anguish of the soul that sinks into the fathomless pit of hell.

It were little compared to the agonizing despair of those who hear those dreaded words of condemnation: "Depart from me, you cursed, into ever-

lasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”²

They are eternally cursed in the eyes of the God who loves them. They are forever damned by Christ who died to redeem them. They were made to dwell with God. Now they must dwell in the company of all the devils of hell for all eternity.

The devils are the fallen angels who rebelled against God. In the very moment in which they revolted they were hurled into hell. Christ said to His disciples: “I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven.”³

The devils are persons. They are bad angels who possess intellect and free will. They suffer the torments of hell: “God spared not the angels that sinned, but delivered them, drawn down by internal ropes to the lower hell, unto torments.”⁴

² St. Matthew xxv, 41. ³ St. Luke x, 18.

⁴ II Epistle of St. Peter ii, 4.

The devils believe in God. They have a kind of vague faith. "Thou believest that there is one God. Thou dost well: the devils also believe and tremble."⁵ The devils hate mankind. "Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour."⁶

The devils will torture and mock the damned forever in hell. They are rulers in hell. "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness."⁷

The damned will suffer great torments. These are called pain of sense. They will dwell in darkness. The fire of hell will be dark and smoky and will emit no light.

⁵ Epistle of St. James ii, 19. ⁶ I Epistle of St. Peter v, 8.

⁷ Epistle to the Ephesians vi, 12.

Hell is called a place of misery and darkness. It is filled with smoke and fire. The angel "opened the bottomless pit: and the smoke of the pit arose, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke of the pit."⁸

The wicked in hell will burn forever: "For he will give fire, and worms into their flesh, that they may burn, and may feel forever."⁹ This is a real fire. Yet we do not know just what its nature is. It needs not to be replenished. It never dies out. It has properties by which it can torture both soul and body.

Though they burn continually, the bodies of the damned are never consumed. The wicked "shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone, which is second death."¹⁰ Though they will never die

⁸ Apocalypse ix, 2. ⁹ Judith xvi, 21.

¹⁰ Apocalypse xxi, 8.

in hell, the damned will continually suffer the torments of death by torture. For this reason the pains of hell are called the second death.

The wicked in hell will be tortured by the stings of an evil conscience: "Their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched."¹¹ The worm here mentioned is generally taken to mean the chidings of an evil conscience.

The damned will be imprisoned. They will suffer an unquenchable thirst: "The sole of his foot shall be held in a snare, and thirst shall burn against him."¹²

Torments will afflict all the senses of the damned. Their eyes will behold the horror that surrounds them. They will be filled with the soot and smoke of the ceaseless flames. With tired ears they will hear the roaring

¹¹ *Isaias* lxvi, 24.

¹² *Job* xviii, 9.

of the fire and the cries and curses of their companions. Their nostrils will be filled with the sickening fumes of burning sulphur.

There will be no fresh air in hell. An unbearable stench will never cease to rise. Moral filth will also be heaped up on all sides. There will be huddled together in unsightly heaps fornicators, covetous, idolators, blasphemers, drunkards and extortioners.¹³ With these will be the unbelievers, the abominable, murders, whoremongers, sorcerers and liars.¹⁴

All the reprobates of the world from every age will be crowded together in hell. The most filthy dungeon on earth would be a place of delights compared with that putrid pit.

The tongues of the damned will be parched with thirst. They will suffer the gnawing pangs of hunger. "Woe

¹³ I Epistle to the Corinthians vi, 11.

¹⁴ Apocalypse **xxi**, 8.

to you that are filled," says Christ, "for you shall hunger."¹⁵ In vain will they cry out with Dives: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame."¹⁶

The damned will suffer excruciating pain to the sense of touch. The flames will burn them always. There will be no moment of cessation. They will have no rest. "The smoke of their torments shall ascend up forever and ever: neither have they rest day or night."¹⁷

The damned will be punished especially in the senses through which they have sinned: "Wherefore thou hast greatly tormented them who in their life have lived foolishly and unjustly,

¹⁵ St. Luke vi, 25.

¹⁶ St. Luke xvi, 24.

¹⁷ Apocalypse xiv, 11.

by the same things which they worshiped.”¹⁸

The wicked are obstinate in hell. They still cling to their sins. They can not perform the least good action. They never cease to do evil. They love sin, but they are filled with horror at the sad lot to which sin has brought them. The time of repentance is past. Hence, they remain in the foul love of sin forever.

The Church has never defined any teaching concerning the location of hell. “Let us not ask where it is, but how we can escape it,” says St. John Chrysostom.¹⁹ It matters little where hell is situated. It is a place of unutterable horrors. It fully expresses the infinite malice of sin.

Many things have been revealed concerning hell. It is well to meditate often on hell. It teaches us to realize

¹⁸ Wisdom xii, 23.

¹⁹ In Rom. hom. 31, n. 5.

the enormity of sin. Well could the Apostle say: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting."²⁰

²⁰ Epistle to the Galatians vi, 7, 8.

CHAPTER XV.

HEAVEN.

HAPPY beyond all measure will those be who at the last judgment hear those joyful words: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."¹

At that moment their hearts will overflow with an endless joy. Loved ones will be united in the peace and glory of eternal blessedness. Together they will enter into God's resplendent kingdom. Then will they understand the words of the Apostle: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him."²

¹ St. Matthew xxv, 34.

² I Epistle to the Corinthians ii, 9.

The just will enter into their eternal reward. There God has expended His endless love in providing joy and happiness for them. "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure. For with thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light, we shall see light."³

Sorrow shall be no more for the blessed: "He shall wipe away tears from every face . . . and they shall say in that day: Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lórd, we have patiently waited for him; we shall rejoice and be joyful in his salvation."⁴

There shall be no more misery: "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame

³ Psalm xxxv, 9, 10.

⁴ Isaias xxv, 8, 9.

man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free . . . everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”⁵

They will enter into an eternal abode of peace: “Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away.”⁶

The countless multitude of the just will be unspeakably happy together. There will be no unlikable persons there. All will be united in love. There will be no envy, no uncharity, no repulsion. All the imperfections

⁵ *Isaias xxxv*, 5-10.

⁶ *Apocalypes xxi*, 3, 4.

of human character will have been removed. There will be no selfishness, no distinctions of class or dignity. "The small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master."⁷

The blessed in Heaven will have no secret troubles in mind or heart. They will have no regrets, no disappointments. They will not feel sorry for the friends who are not there. They can not suffer the least pang at the thought of those who are damned.

Even if those who were dear to them on earth are amongst the damned, the blessed can not mourn. For they shall see the justice of God. They shall know that no one was lost through ignorance. No one was lost except through his own wilful malice. Their intellects will be enlightened and they will understand the judgments of God. They will rejoice in His infinite justice.

⁷ Job iii, 19.

The essence of eternal happiness consists in the sight of God. This is called the Beatific Vision. "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face."⁸

We shall be resplendent with the glory of God: "But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."⁹

The three chosen disciples were enraptured on Mount Thabor. Christ for a moment revealed the glory of His countenance. They cried out and asked Him to allow them to remain there forever.

St. John says: "I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and in the sight of the Lamb,

⁸ I Epistle to the Corinthians xiii, 12.

⁹ II Epistle to the Corinthians iii, 18.

clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”¹⁰

“They shall see his face: and his name shall be on their foreheads.”¹¹ We shall see God in all His glory.” “Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God: and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like to him because we shall see him as he is.”¹²

Through the Beatific Vision we possess God. He is our last end and the object of our being. We are united to Him in love and joy. Hence the Beatific Vision is the perfection of eternal happiness. “Now this is eternal life: That they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”¹³

St. John says: “We shall be like

¹⁰ Apocalypse vii, 9.

¹¹ Apocalypse xxii, 4.

¹² I St. John iii, 2.

¹³ St. John xvii, 3.

unto him.”¹⁴ This signifies that the Beatific Vision consists of two things. We shall behold God as He is in His nature and substance and we shall become such as if we were gods. “For those who enjoy the Beatific Vision, though they retain their own nature, they take on a certain admirable form that is almost divine, so that they seem to be gods rather than men.”¹⁵

The Beatific Vision does not come to us through the sight of our bodily eyes. It is more than a transient view of natural sight. It is an intellectual act. God elevates our intellect so that it is capable of seeing His divine essence. We behold God perpetually through this intellectual vision. It is called intuitive vision.

Pope Benedict XII defined this teaching. The souls of the saints in Heaven “have seen and see the divine

¹⁴ I St. John iii, 2.

¹⁵ Roman Catechism, part I, c. 13, n. 7.

essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face. Nothing comes between them and the object of their view. The divine essence appears bare, clear and open to them. Through this vision they enjoy the divine essence. By the joy of this vision the souls of the departed are truly happy and possess life and eternal rest."¹⁶

Through the Beatific Vision we see God as the angels see Him. Our intellect will possess the light of glory: "In thy light, we shall see light."¹⁷ By the light of glory our intellect will become like unto the intellect of God. It will be as if the nature of our intellect were changed. It will take on a new character by which it can comprehend a higher order of knowledge. The Beatific Vision is a mystery of Faith. It is known to us only through divine revelation.

¹⁶ Denzinger, n. 456.

¹⁷ Psalm xxxv, 10.

The blessed in Heaven enjoy perfect happiness. They can never commit sin. For this would separate them from God. Their happiness is eternal. If they could foresee an end to their bliss they would not be perfectly happy.

“But the just shall live forevermore: and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them with the most High. Therefore they shall receive a kingdom of glory, a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord.”¹⁸ “And so we shall always be with the Lord,”¹⁹ says St. Paul.

Though the blessed in Heaven will be perfectly happy, some will enjoy more happiness than others. This does not mean that some will possess better joys than others. Everyone will possess all the joy that he can know. No one will have cause to envy the joy of another.

¹⁸ Wisdom v, 16-17.

¹⁹ I Epistle to the Thessalonians iv, 16.

It will be as if all sat down to a great banquet. All partake of the same good things. Yet they will not all consume the same amount. The more a soul is perfected in this life, the more happiness it can enjoy in the next world. Virgins, martyrs, and doctors of the Faith will possess a special crown in Heaven.

Holy Writ says of virgins: "And they sang as it were a new canticle, before the throne. . . . These are they who were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."²⁰

Of the martyrs it was said: "These that are clothed in white robes, who are they? And whence came they? . . . These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

²⁰ Apocalypse xiv, 3-4.

Therefore they are before the throne of God.”²¹

The prophet refers to the doctors of Faith when he says: “But they that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternity.”²² This special crown does not appear externally in the blessed. It is a quality of the soul.

The blessed will also possess the sacramental characters they received on earth. “After this life,” says St. Thomas, “the (sacramental) characters will remain in the good to their glory and in the wicked to their ignominy, just as the military character remains in soldiers after the victory. It remains in the victorious to their glory and in the conquered unto punishment.”²³

²¹ Apocalypse vii, 13-15.

²² Daniel xii, 3.

²³ Summa Theologica 3 q. 63 a. 5.

The blessed in Heaven can enjoy certain accidental pleasures. They rejoice in a special manner when they meet a friend or a loved one who has just entered Heaven. They will know their own even better than they knew them on earth. They will rejoice in their company. They will see many whom they have longed to see.

They will see the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. They will see the Apostles. They will see all the great saints and martyrs. They will converse with them about many interesting events. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends, loved ones, all will rejoice when they are united.

The bodies of the blessed will be glorified in Heaven. The glorified body will be incapable of suffering. For this reason it is said to be impassible. The body will be in perfect control of the soul. No external force

can cause it any inconvenience or inflict any injury upon it. St. Paul says of the body: "This corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality."²⁴

The glorified body will also possess great splendor. "Our Lord Jesus Christ will reform the body of our lowliness made like to the body of his glory."²⁵ The just will shine with great glory. The beauty of their pure souls will be transmitted to their bodies. These will be like the body of Christ when He was transfigured on Thabor. "Then shall the just shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father."²⁶

The glorified body will possess great agility. It will move with the rapidity of thought. It will obey perfectly every command of the soul. In an instant it will pass over the greatest

²⁴ I Epistle to the Corinthians xv, 53.

²⁵ Epistle to the Philippians iii, 21.

²⁶ St. Matthew xiii, 43.

distances. Nothing can hinder its movements. It will be like the body of Christ after the resurrection. Christ appeared and disappeared at will.

The glorified body will be endowed with great acuteness. All its animal operations will cease. It will not need nourishment. It will not generate. It will serve perfectly the spiritual life of the soul. All bodily defects will be taken away.

The blessed will possess great beauty. They will possess every natural perfection. Their limbs will be well formed. Those who died in childhood will have their natural development. All the parts of the body will be normal and perfect. There will be no birthmarks or traces of disease. They will possess every natural adornment.

The blessed will have all their internal and external organs and members. When Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He

said: "See my hands and feet, that it is I myself; handle, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me to have."²⁷

The glorified body of Christ is the type of all glorified bodies. The organs indeed do not exercise the same functions as they exercised on earth. They serve to form a perfect body. Certain parts of the body, such as the teeth, hair and nails, serve as adornments. The blood is restored to the veins.

The blessed still retain their sex. For sexual difference is a natural quality in man. The blessed will all be fully developed. Yet they will not all be of the same size. Each will be of a size suited to the perfect symmetry of his body.

The blessed will use all their sense faculties. They will see, with their natural eyes, the beauty of their surroundings. They will possess the sense

²⁷ St. Luke xxiv, 39.

of touch. They will be able to exercise the sense of taste and smell.

The blessed will not nourish their bodies by eating and drinking. Yet God will provide some substance to delight their taste. They will exercise the faculty of hearing. They will possess the power of speech. They will converse with one another. The contemplation of their spiritual joys will not interfere with the action of their senses. They will not be wrapt in ecstasy so as not to notice the things around them. This happens on earth because the body is weak and imperfect.

Undoubtedly the just will inhabit a visible world after the resurrection. They will have real bodies. Hence they could hardly be in a purely spiritual state. They will certainly dwell in a world of great beauty and splendor.

Christ ascended into Heaven. Wher-

ever Christ is, there is Heaven. Nothing more can be said with certainty about the location of Heaven. "We look for new heavens and a new earth according to his promises, in which justice dwelleth."²⁸ And the prophet says: "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth."²⁹

Truly "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the joys that God has prepared for those who love Him." The thought of Heaven thrills our very being. Again to live, free from the shadow of sorrow and pain! To dwell in an abode of endless love will be our portion. We shall be closely united with God. Heart to heart, face to face, we shall love Him and see Him. For all eternity the glow of His infinite love shall shine upon us. The mind is lost in the contemplation

²⁸ II Epistle of St. Peter iii, 13.

²⁹ Isaias lxxv, 17.

of these blessings. It will indeed be worthy of an all-loving God. It will be a blessed life indeed.

Wise and extraordinary men were the saints. They set their hearts upon eternal life. Well might they despise the goods of this world. Well might they condemn its fleeting pleasures. Well might St. Paul say: "I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ."³⁰

May God draw our hearts to Himself. May He turn our thoughts toward eternity. May He teach us to remember our last end. May He enkindle our hearts with His love. May He fill our minds with wisdom.

Night and day we might well ponder on the great truths of eternity. Life is a bitter struggle. Yet we are filled with the hope of immortality. We can say with Holy Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last

³⁰ Epistle to the Philippians i, 23.

day I shall rise out of the earth. And I shall be clothed again with my skin and in my flesh I shall see my God. Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. This my hope is laid up in my bosom.”³¹

³¹ Job xix, 25-27.

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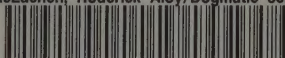
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